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RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY 4525
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RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS PRIORITY 4899
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RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 9631
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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 000967

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XOXO
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

SIPDIS
E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

All media (lead story in Ha'aretz) quoted President Bush as saying yesterday that the recent disclosure of details on Israel's strike last September against a nuclear facility in Syria was meant to pressure North Korea and send a strong message to Tehran. Israel

Radio reported that yesterday the members of the quarterly Israeli-American strategic dialogue expressed their belief that current sanctions against Iran are having economic effects, but so far have been ineffective in halting Iran's nuclear program. Citing Reuters, Ha'aretz quoted World Jewish Congress officials, who met with Swiss President Pascal Couchepin yesterday, as saying that they would urge the Swiss government to rethink a major deal to buy natural gas from Iran.

Ha'aretz reported that Bush sought to project optimism towards the prospect of an Israeli-Palestinian peace accord this year and accused Hamas of trying to undermine peace efforts, while avoiding direct criticism of former U.S. President Jimmy Carter meetings with the group. The Internet site Ynet reported yesterday that a recent meeting between the lead negotiations -- Tzipi Livni and Ahmed Qurei -- ended badly after Livni presented a proposal laying out future borders with Israel retaining control over Jerusalem, the Jordan Valley and larger settlement blocks in the West Bank. Reportedly, Qurei reacted angrily by grabbing the map and pushing it away with both hands. Livni's office refused to comment on the incident saying that the negotiations are not being conducted in public, while a senior Palestinian source confirmed the details. Another Israeli source quoted in the story said that this just clarifies how far away the sides are from an agreement. This morning Israeli Radio reported that in an interview with the Palestinian daily Al-Ayyam U.S. Consul-General in Jerusalem Jacob Walles criticized Israeli settlement and roadblock policy, and hinted that the settlement blocs, for which former prime minister Ariel Sharon allegedly obtained from President Bush on April 14, 2004, a U.S. Letter of Assurances okaying their future annexation to Israel, are negotiable.

Ha'aretz reported that Israel relayed a message this week to Egypt that it objected to the outlines of the cease-fire now under discussion for Gaza, since it might lead to the strengthening of Hamas and the weakening of PA President Mahmoud Abbas. Ha'aretz quoted a GOI source in Jerusalem as saying that at this time it appears that there has been no significant progress in talks between Egypt and the Palestinian factions. Israel Radio reported that the PFLP and Islamic Jihad have voiced reservations about Hamas's terms for a cease-fire. All media reported that yesterday IDF Intelligence head Maj. Gen. Amos Yadlin told the cabinet that Hamas will do everything it can to spoil Israel's 60th birthday bash next week with a high-profile terrorist attack. Israel Radio reported that yesterday Secretary Rice told an American Jewish Committee audience that Hamas, which she said "is increasingly serving as proxy warriors for Iran," must be isolated. The Jerusalem Post quoted senior Hamas officials Mahmoud Zahar as saying yesterday that Israel may have 200 nuclear warheads, but that Hamas has 200,000 people who want to blow themselves up inside Israel. Ha'aretz and other media reported that Israel-Egypt relations have recently warmed up following the border breach by Hamas.

Maariv reported that what jump-started the recent flurry of activity on the Syrian negotiating track was a phone call by PM Ehud Olmert to Turkish PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan, in which he allegedly said that he is aware of the "deposit" (left by the late PM Yitzhak Rabin).

Leading media cited the IDF's insistence that the Gaza mother and her four children killed on Monday were struck by militants' explosives, not a shell. Ha'aretz reported that the IDF probe will be presented this evening to the army brass. The newspaper cited admission by military sources that the evidence available is limited.

The Jerusalem Post reported that the possibility of holding an international conference in Moscow sometime in June is expected to be one of the main issues the Quartet will discuss in London on Friday, with Israel under the impression that the Kremlin is intent on going ahead with it.

Ha'aretz and Israel Radio cited a joint Israeli-Palestinian report recently submitted to security authorities, according to which 10 roadblocks that Israel set up in the West Bank have little security value and are needlessly disrupting trade in the Palestinian territories. The report, drawn up by a team that included U.S. experts, Palestinian officials, and former IDF officers working

under the auspices of the Peres Center for Peace, the Palestine Center for National Strategic Studies, and the Danish government, urges Israel to remove the roadblocks.

Over the past few days media reported that the Muslim hackers' group DZ Team (comprising Algerians and Egyptians) broke into the Bank of Israel's Internet site and threatened to attack other Israeli sites.

Yediot reported that while Jordan is preserving and maintaining the resources of the Dead Sea's Eastern bank, Israel is not doing anything on its side.

Ha'aretz quoted Yoel Lifschitz, the Deputy Director General of the Health Ministry, as saying that Israel has been kept on the USTR's priority watch list of countries accused of intellectual property rights (IPR) violations because the Industry and Trade Ministry hid key information from the health and justice ministries.

All media highlighted Holocaust Memorial Day-related events. The commemoration will last from this evening through tomorrow night. The Jerusalem Post reported that yesterday the U.S. military attache in Israel was on an IDF-guided tour of the Yad Mordechai Holocaust Museum for foreign military officers.

Major media reported that the Forbes business magazine has rated Israel as the world's most "up-and-coming" real estate market.

Mideast:

Summary:

Columnist Calev Ben-David wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "The only answer [to the Hamas offensive in Gaza] is a sustained public diplomacy effort to demonstrate what the results would be if the IDF didn't act against Hamas."

Uri Elitzur, who was a senior aide top former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, wrote in the editorial of the nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe (4/30): "Israel shouldn't apologize for the deaths of the mother and her four children in Beit Hanun.... The Palestinians have no one to blame but themselves."

The ultra-Orthodox Hamodi'a editorialized: "Syrian President Assad ... isn't on his own. He can't free himself from the axis of evil."

Conservative columnist Yosef Harif wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: "[Syria] can only achieve [progress] through U.S. and Western assistance.... [Israel] can certainly not make an early declaration about a withdrawal."

Jewish affairs reporter Yair Sheleg wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The European sin is not anti-Semitism but rather pacifism, especially when dealing with the Europeans' attitude toward force on the part of a Western country. But this is not a sin that is any less dangerous than anti-Semitism."

Block Quotes:

II. "Making the Best of a No-Win Situation"

Columnist Calev Ben-David wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (4/30): "The phrase 'damned if we do, damned if we don't' is an apt description of Israel's overall situation in Gaza as it confronts an enemy that doesn't hesitate to sue the hapless civilians of Beit Hanun as cover for its Qassam and sniper fire. At the end of the day -- or any specific day, to be more precise -- there's nothing Israel's oft-criticized hasbara [public relations] efforts can do to completely assuage the impact of images like those

out of Beit Hanun on Monday. The only answer is a sustained public diplomacy effort to demonstrate what the results would be if the IDF didn't act against Hamas -- namely, an even greater increase in the attacks against Israeli civilians in Sderot and other communities along the Gaza border."

II. "Don't Apologize"

Uri Elitzur, who was a senior aide top former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, wrote in the editorial of the nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe (4/30): "Israel shouldn't apologize for the deaths of the mother and her four children in Beit Hanun.... The Palestinians have no one to blame but themselves. They started this war; they're the only ones who can stop it; every day they again choose not to do so. Neither should Israel invest enormous resources to court the world media to prove its claim that the killing was caused by Palestinian explosives and not by IDF fire. That Sisyphean PR effort would do more harm than good.... All Israel can say is that such things happen in war and that they will unfortunately occur in the future, too, if the Palestinians do not decide to stop the terror and Qassam fire."

III. "Syria Has Capitulated to Iran"

The ultra-Orthodox Hamodi'a editorialized (4/30): "It was to be expected that talk about a peace agreement with Syria would dissolve during its formative period. Syrian President Assad ... isn't on his own. He can't free himself from the axis of evil.... The Iranians panicked when the media blatantly publicized messages between Israel and Syria. They were all the more terrified when Assad appointed an envoy to manage the talks via a Turkish representative . When the Iranians panic, the Syrian President has hardly any choice but to give in.... At least as regards the prevention of scary and painful discord [in Israel], the Syrian President, who climbed down the tall tree that Olmert placed in front of him, deserves thanks."

IV. "No to Syria"

Conservative columnist Yosef Harif wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (4/30): "Israel has a bitter experience with Syria. Over recent years, when Damascus-Tehran ties became stronger and as Syria is flooding Hizbullah with weapons and rockets, it has turned into a dangerous enemy. Syria aspires to stabilize its shaky economic conditions and enter a track of development and of scientific and technological progress. It can only achieve these through U.S. and Western assistance. It will be able to receive that aid only if it disengages from Iran, shake off Hizbullah, and cease to sponsor the terrorist organizations operating from its territory. Negotiations can only develop if Syria does fulfill those conditions. [Israel] can certainly not make an early declaration about a withdrawal. Some people fear that Olmert, who aspires to a diplomatic achievement for electoral reasons, will express his willingness for important concessions on the Golan before the issue is intensely discussed. This is a risky gamble."

IV. "No Less Dangerous than Anti-Semitism"

Jewish affairs reporter Yair Sheleg wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (4/30): "Israel is not alone in facing the arrows of European criticism, but rather stands alongside the United States. Uncle Sam is also constantly attacked by European public opinion for having aggressive policies; the clearest example of the past few years being, of course, the American invasion and control of Iraq. And indeed there is a common denominator to the European criticism of Israel and the U.S., and this common denominator apparently also stems from the lessons of that war. It is the phenomenon of European pacifism, the desire to avoid the use of any kind of force, to avoid any forceful confrontation even with evil regimes. This instinct is particularly salient when talking about a confrontation of a Western country with a society from the developing world, such as the confrontation between the U.S. and Iraq or between Israel and the Palestinians.... Israel is indeed discriminated against by the criticism leveled at it; not necessarily because it is a Jewish state, but rather mainly because it is a Western state. That is to say, the European sin is not anti-Semitism but rather pacifism, especially when dealing with the Europeans' attitude toward force on the part of a Western country.

But this is not a sin that is any less dangerous than anti-Semitism."

MORENO